

Feature

Associations in 2020

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By: Interview by Jennifer J. Salopek

Are you ready for a time when association members vote for their leadership? That's just one of the changes two workplace experts predict in the next ten years.

Though the fax machine was the defining invention for workers born before 1946, those same workers are now as likely to contribute to the web as millennials. That's just one of the findings of Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd's new book, [*The 2020 Workplace: How Innovative Companies Attract, Develop, and Keep Tomorrow's Employees Today*](#).

The authors, founders of the human-resources consulting firm Future Workplace and bloggers for *Harvard Business Review*, based their book on a survey of 2,200 people to discover their needs, wants, and expectations in the workplace today. But *The 2020 Workplace* also sheds light on how the office of the future might function. "Employees will work on global teams with people they will never meet, which drives the need for companies to be über connected," says Meister. "Further, as more employees use social media tools in their personal lives, companies need to figure out how to harness those tools and leverage them within the enterprise."

Meister, an expert on workplace learning, and Willyerd, a former chief learning officer at Sun Microsystems, uncovered a host of insights on how different generations look at management, communication, and leadership. Informed by the major trends they uncovered—a multigenerational workforce, a blurring of the lines between life and work, elected association leaders, and that need for organizations to be über connected—the two offer a practical game plan for finding talent, as well as 20 predictions for the workplace of 2020. They spoke to *Associations Now* about the next 10 years of the workplace, who's most primed to lead their employees, and what future transformations might mean for associations.

***Associations Now*: Most of your book is based on the findings of your original research, which revealed trends that will shape the workplace over the next decade and how members of different generations approach their work. Why go out on a limb with the predictions?**

Jeanne C. Meister: Our research did show some clear expectations of how things are going to unfold in the workplace over the next 10 years. We were able to see what some forward-thinking organizations were already doing, such as using social media for recruiting. We could see the connections between the trends we uncovered and the practices these early adopters were already using. As we move toward 2020 and word bubbles out about these practices, increasing numbers of organizations will adopt them as efficient.

Karie Willyerd: Half of the world's population is under age 30. As global diversity increases, it becomes a mission issue to understand language and culture. Sensitivity is crucial to responsiveness. I think that associations have felt this earlier and more intensely than companies have.

Prediction number seven reads, "Job requirements for CEOs [in 2020] will include blogging." Why? And is this true for association CEOs as well?

Meister: The workplace-engagement model we created out of our research shows what top talent seeks in an employer of choice. They value transparency and authenticity. If CEOs and others don't step up to the challenge, they risk being poorly rated by employees or written up on such websites as [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com).

Blogs are as vital for association CEOs as corporate executives. They give you an opportunity to be proactive and to get your message out there—in your own voice.

Willyerd: Plus, you can connect with far more people via a blog than you can with email; you can reach everyone in your constituency base, plus other readers you may not even know about, such as prospective employees.

Indeed, you predict that employee recruiting will start on social networking sites.

Willyerd: The way organizations find talent is changing. Your web presence is a way to connect with nontraditional candidates. Associations can use social media recruiting for both paid staff and volunteers. The global talent shortage we predict is not one of people but of skills. We must forge all possible avenues to find the people with the skills we need.

Another prediction is that social media literacy will be a requirement for all employees. What is social media literacy?

Meister: What we really mean by "literacy" is that employers will have to train their employees on how to conduct themselves online as a representative of the enterprise. People need to be told what to disclose and what not to, as they carry the employer brand with them online. This training will become as essential as diversity and ethics training.

Willyerd: Employees need to be made aware how "living a life out loud" can backfire if they're not careful. One story we heard was about a new consultant at one of the big firms, making his way to Memphis for a client engagement. Out of his frustration with airline delays, bad weather, whatever, he tweeted, "Memphis sucks" on Twitter. Well, what do you know? The clients were following him on Twitter, and the engagement got off to a really negative start.

Employers must create understandable guidelines that show employees how to be respectful and responsible. It's confusing, because people are now using the same tools

in their professional lives as they do in their personal lives. They need to understand that what is in the public domain will follow them forever. Employers can help their employees understand the potential implications of their actions online.

You predict that in 2020 employees will elect their leaders. Associations have always been pretty democratic organizations. Does this mean that the corporate world will follow our lead? Will leaders have to campaign for their positions?

Meister: Members of the millennial generation are growing up with the expectation of having a voice; they are constantly rating people, places, and experiences. Organizations can build an element of this into their leadership model as the idea of ratings percolates into the workplace. It's like taking the 360-degree performance review to a new level.

How do we ensure that organizational leaders are prepared to lead, and not just the winners of a popularity contest?

Meister: Organizations will have to adapt their talent management practices to ensure that candidates are well rounded and have had the opportunity to develop as leaders before they reach the vetting process.

Willyerd: Eventually, everyone will have a credibility score, especially managers. You will be publicly rated on your leadership. It will be the responsibility of the association's board to weigh the popularity aspect against the association's needs, but you can't be an effective leader if you don't resonate with the people you are leading.

You predict that lifelong learning will become a business requirement. Many associations are already experienced in providing lifelong learning for their members, through continuing professional education, certification programs, conferences, and so forth. As we move toward 2020, how can they create efficiencies and make these programs more effective?

Meister: As tools become available, employers will need universities as partners more than ever. Similarly, institutions of higher learning will focus less on open enrollment and more on customized programs. Associations and other nonprofits can form consortia to which universities provide the latest content via the most current delivery techniques.

There are many creative opportunities to partner. Associations have what universities want: working adult students. You can leverage their faculty as subject-matter experts in your association's branded certificate program.

You write that corporate social responsibility is very important to younger generations of workers as they seek employers of choice. Associations and nonprofits are mission driven; for many, social responsibility is a given. How do we convert that into a successful campaign to attract the best talent?

Meister: That prediction was supported by lots of research, both ours and others'. Millennials have grown up giving back. It is wired into their expectations. Therefore, they apply that lens to prospective employers. Really savvy associations will build that into their recruiting.

Willyerd: This is good news for associations. Millennials are looking to fulfill their personal missions. Associations may not be able to compete on money, but if you can help prospective employees link their personal mission to yours, you can assure them a role in a changing world.

Jennifer J. Salopek is a freelance writer in McLean, Virginia. Email: jjsalopek@cox.net

Why I Blog? By Jay Karen

Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd say that blogging will become a job requirement for CEOs in the next decade. I totally agree.

I have always been an avid adopter of social media. I started my blog (www.innkeepingblog.com) about two-and-a-half years ago, about six months after taking my first CEO job. I wanted to give a personal face to the industry and our association and to provide some personal perspective on the issues facing both. The blog shows who I am and what I think. It became popular in our industry when I blogged about a four-day internship I did at a member's property—a bed and breakfast in Seattle. Members found it quite amusing that I was cooking breakfast and cleaning bathrooms.

The blog is completely different from an email newsletter. I use a more casual writing tone and make it clear that the opinions are mine and not those of the association. I rarely use the blog to announce official association business, publish press releases, and stuff like that. I use it to share personal observations when traveling that apply to our work world. I also use it to keep members updated on my lobbying efforts. By reporting on whom I've seen and what I've discussed with them, the process becomes very transparent. Making that process public holds the other party accountable to be responsive.

If I had to give some advice to other association CEOs who are thinking about starting blogs, it would consist of three main points:

1. Don't blog unless you're going to take it seriously and write it yourself. The task doesn't have to be onerous; I write new posts about every other week. This is frequent enough to stay current but not so frequent as to overburden our already busy members.

A genuine, sincere voice is critical; readers can tell if the posts are written by the PR department.

2. Use tools that help you integrate your social media presence. You don't have to blog, and tweet, and update your association's Facebook page as three separate activities; there are tools that help you do this and manage your time more efficiently.

3. Strive to give readers what they want. In my industry, which represents the owners of bed and breakfasts, there is a real appreciation for the personal approach. Members want to know your take on things, so give it to them.

Jay Karen is executive director of the Professional Association of Innkeepers International. He blogs at www.innkeepingblog.com.